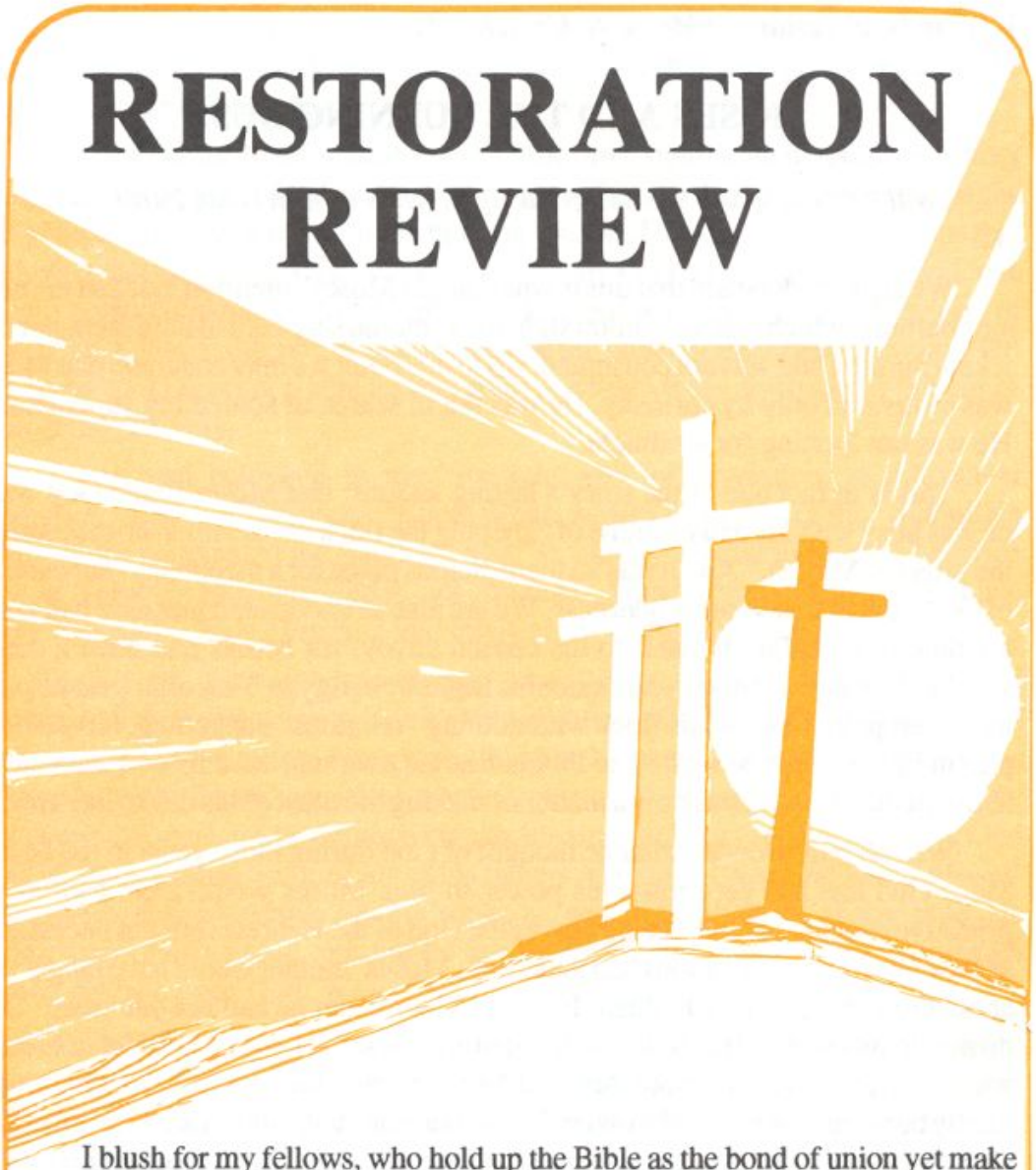
RESTORATION REVIEW



I blush for my fellows, who hold up the Bible as the bond of union yet make their opinions of it a test of fellowship; who plead for union of all Christians; yet refuse fellowship with such as dissent from their notions. -- *Barton W. Stone*

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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . .No. 17

MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH

I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.—Exodus 3:3

We are to understand that this is what caught Moses' attention, not that the bush was burning, which was a common sight for a veteran shepherd in the desert, but that it kept burning and was not consumed. Up to this point we may conclude that Moses was motivated only by curiosity. He was not in search of something supernatural. He was not looking for a miracle.

This is in fact one of the story's lasting lessons: that Moses found God when be was busy with his daily routine of "keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian." And it was an inauspicious place for a theophany (appearance of God), out in a desolate wilderness. We are also to understand that God bad taken his time in revealing himself to bis chosen envoy, for Moses had been a desert shepherd for upward of 40 years since his flight from Egypt. Year after year be plied the desert paths tending his flock with nothing "religious" happening. His colorful past in Egypt, when be sat next to Pharaoh as his own son, must by now have faded in his memory, and it was now a matter of making the most of his day to day chores.

We can only wonder what be thought of God during those years in the desert. Since God bad not yet shown his power to him, Moses would have had only a primitive concept of God, seeing him as the God of the Hebrews but not necessarily as the only god, for all nations had their gods. Moses' mother would have taught him about God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but be had not yet "seen" God do marvelous things. He hardly saw God in any personal way. El Shaddai or Elohim was yet a tribal God, "the mountain God," and any faith Moses bad at this time would hardly be more than fear and wonder. His wanderings with his flock had brought him to the environs of Horeb, the mountain of God. We don't know bow common this was for him or how often be had been there before.

Even in the area of Horeb it is unlikely that Moses had anything more than a subdued awareness of the God of his fathers. There is no evidence that be was waiting for something to happen, or that be was at this time a man of prayer. From what took place at the burning bush we may suppose that be had no idea of ever returning to Egypt, certainly not as a prophet or a deliverer. He was not waiting for a "call" from God. On that day, one of the most significant in human history, Moses was simply doing his thing as a shepherd, the same thing he had been doing for years and years. He had no reason to suppose that

that day would be any different. They were all dull and tiresome, and he supposed life would continue the way it had been.

That is one of its great lessons: we don't choose God, he chooses us, and he may well intrude into our lives when we least expect it. And God may well be there amidst the simplest, ordinary routines of life. He has a way of entering the commonplaces of our lives.

The story of the burning bush is one of the most significant in religious history and probably the most important in the history of Israel. Israel's faith really began with Moses, for it was not until the burning bush and the Ten Commandments that followed that Israel saw God not only as the only God but as a personal God, one with a personal name, and one who had decreed their destiny. Abraham was of course the father of the nation, but Moses was the father of their faith. Abraham left his home "not knowing where he was going," while Moses always knew where he was going and why.

If Abraham belonged to the "starlight age" of revelation, as Alexander Campbell liked to identify the dispensations, Moses belonged to the "moonlight age," which anticipated the "sunlight age." It was Moses that the early Christians saw as a prophet like unto Christ, not Abraham. Moses came to know God much more personally than Abraham, and this was his great contribution to Israel.

The God of heaven was watching when Moses "turned aside to see" and approached the burning bush. God had his attention. And now, after all those years since Egypt, God speaks to his man, calling him by name, "Moses, Moses." Moses responds, but he doesn't yet know what is going on or who speaks to him, probably not even when he is told to remove his sandals since be stands on holy ground. God now identifies himself as the God of his fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses' response is understandable, seeing where he was in his thinking at that time. He didn't start praising God, nor did he ask for further information. He was afraid, hiding his face from God. We can believe he was speechless.

God was director of the scenario. He had to take charge of the proceedings. He goes on to reveal himself to Moses as one who not only knows what is going on in the world, especially in Egypt, but as one who cares about suffering and injustice. The series of active verbs that follow reveal a God that Moses had not known before: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt. . . I have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings. . . I have come down to deliver them. . ."

Then came the great call, The biggest verb of all: "I will send you to Pharoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt. "It is understandable that Moses would resist the call. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of

Israel out of Egypt?" was not false modesty, but a recognition of fact. Moses knew enough about Egypt to know that his assignment was beyond his power. God gave him the only assurance that be needed: *I will be with you.* That is the good news of the Bible. If God is with us there is no task beyond our reach. That God and one person make a majority is a great truth. This is why Paul said and why we can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philip. 4:13).

When one has a reasonable doubt about God's call and looks for a sign, God seems willing to accommodate. But God appears to have given an odd sign when he tells Moses he would eventually lead the people out of Egypt and bring them to the very mountain on which they then stood. That must have blown Moses' mind that it was all going to be so real that slaves then in Egypt would one day gather as a free people in that mountain under his leadership. If he could believe that, it was enough.

One cannot be too sure that the voice he hears is God's rather than his own. We are less than faithful when we inject our own will into the scenario by having God say what we want him to say. It is tragic to claim that we are called by God when we call ourselves.

What is important to us in the story of the burning bush is that we can have fellowship with the same God that spoke to Moses. It was the living God, the one in whom we live and have our being, the one who loves and cares, the one who hears our cries and knows our suffering, the one who is ready to act for our sake. Moses was not an animist. He did not look for a god in the bush. It is noteworthy that the bush is virtually ignored in the rest of Scripture. That is because it was not the bush that mattered. Once Moses felt the searing presence of God all else faded into insignificance.

God was no longer a God of terror or the mighty Lord of the wilderness, mountain, and storm. He no longer spoke through thunder or earthquake. God now spoke to Moses as one would speak to a friend, apparently in his own language. God was now approachable. It was as if heaven itself opened up saying, "Moses, Moses." The God of nature now becomes the God of history.

The story becomes all the weightier when God at last reveals his name to Moses. When Moses asked God his name it was an inquiry into his nature, for all gods had names and the name revealed the nature of the god. Moses knew from his knowledge of Egypt that he would be expected to give the name of the God who had sent him. God tells Moses that his name is Yahweh, the best we can do with that four-letter Hebrew word that scholars call the tetragrammaton, which means four letters. It has been variously translated *I am who I am, I am the One who is, I will be what I will be, etc.* The name sums up all that God is and will be to his people. Moses may have supposed that if he knew God's secret name he could use it in a power struggle with the gods of Pharaoh. He grew up in

Egypt believing in magic and in magical names, and when he at last went to Egypt he had to deal with Pharaoh's magicians. Egypt was a land of magic.

It is not going too far to say that in Egypt Moses introduced a new God to his people, a new God with a new name, for Yahweh was not known before the Exodus. It is made clear in Ex. 6:3 that while God had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and had made a covenant with them, he had not revealed to them his name. Egypt was a new beginning. God would deliver his people by means of almighty power, and it would be in the name of Yahweh.

Even after all this Moses flinches in the face of the charge. He was saying, "Anyone but me!," which is where many of us are. "They will not believe me," he told Yahweh, but there is no evidence that they would not have believed him without signs and miracles. He, like us who blame the church for our inadequacies, too quickly blamed the people. Still God gives him a further sign, one primarily for *him*, the shepherd's rod that he held in his hand would have magical power. He could also make his hand leprous and then whole again by mere movement. As irrational as this may appear, it was God's way of dealing with Moses' unbelief. Are we all that different when we are not satisfied with the promise that God loves us and will be with us, and look for such signs as tongues and healings?

Still Moses hesitated. Now his excuse was that he was not eloquent enough for Pharaoh's court—"I am slow of speech and of tongue," which was probably true. Yahweh at last hands his newly-chosen prophet, and the greatest of all the prophets, a mild rebuke: "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him deaf, or dumb, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." God was telling him that if he was the one who created him he could surely give him the power to execute his mission.

But still Moses was obdurate. "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person." Anyone but me, Lord! His rebellion, which strikes us as incredible, reveals how human Moses was and how impossible he perceived the assignment. He could not bear the thought of confronting all the resources of the most powerful nation on earth, even with God's help.

Now Yahweh was angry with Moses. Enough was enough! God at last names Aaron, Moses' brother, as the spokesman in Egypt. "I will be with your mouth and with his mouth," he assures Moses, "and I will teach you what you shall do." He again points to the rod by which Moses can do signs. There is no evidence that Moses was at this point all that willing to take on the task, but he had run out of excuses.

In asking his father-in-law for permission to leave, Moses was not just being courteous, for in marrying Jethro's daughter he had become part of his family, and it was important that he leave in peace. He took his wife and children with him, which we may wonder if God intended. Yahweh warns Moses in advance that he will harden Pharaoh's heart. Moses was fully aware of the magnitude of the task before him. From this point on he never again flinches in the face of the impossibilities. We can say that Moses did some growing since the day he encountered the burning bush.

Do we have burning bushes in our Christian life, and do we become burning bushes through which God speaks to others? Might some unexpected experience be a burning bush through which God gets our attention? A telephone call or a letter? A book, a sermon, even an article like this one? When we feel the searing presence of God, the great I Am, there is our burning bush. Fervent prayer and praise might often have their fiery bushes. Little children might be burning bushes.

What really matters in all this is that the time came when God revealed himself as the one, living God of heaven. A real, personal God who has a name, who hears, sees, feels, and responds when his people are in trouble.

I have come down! he said to Moses. He comes to be with us and in us. He reveals himself in Jesus Christ and he fills us with his Spirit. God with us! It started with Moses at the burning bush. Does anything else really matter all that much?—*the Editor*

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DO WE HAVE A COMPLETE BIBLE?

The older I grow in the work of restoring unity among our divided people the more persuaded I am that much of our problem stems from a Fundamentalist approach to the Bible. Strictly speaking, the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches are not Fundamentalists, if for no other reason the Fundamentalists would not accept us as such (because of our views on baptism), and also because we would have nothing to do with the Fundamentalists. There are other reasons, such as our people having a much more rationalistic approach to the Bible and being more open to modem biblical research, sort of.

Our people take a strong position on the authority of the Bible, but this does not make them Fundamentalists. Even believing in the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible does not make one a Fundamentalist. The essence of Fundamentalism, as James Barr observes in his study of the subject, is that the authority of Scripture is necessarily tied to its inerrancy. The Bible stands as authoritative *only* if it is without error! This is why the faith

of people of this mindset is threatened when they are confronted by a single possible error in the Bible. Our people since the days of Stone and Campbell have never taken this position even though we have always been "people of the Book" and have highly esteemed the Scriptures as the word of God.

But still we have some other Fundamentalist traits, such as our exclusivism and in some of the ways we treat the Bible. I refer to such ideas as the Bible being a complete and perfect book, and the notion that "We just take the Bible for what it says" and "It means what it says." All this is not only uncritical and unthinking but irresponsible. No one always takes the Bible for what it says, and no one is satisfied to let the Bible always mean just what it says. Example: We all concede that Jesus did not *really* mean that one is to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand if they tempt him to sin, but that is what he said. And we all know that the Bible is sometimes wrong, if we'll face up to it, such as in Lev. 11:6 where it says hares chew the cud, and in Mt. 23:35 where Jesus is reported to have used the wrong name for the father of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:20-21).

Fundamentalists create a safety net by blaming such errors on copyists, for the original writings (autographs) were inerrant. They insist that the errors are only in the copies (apographs)! One wonders how they know this since the autographs no longer exist and cannot be examined. They are asking us to believe that God, for whatever reason, preserved the autographs without error but didn't bother to do the same for the apographs, which is the only Bible the church has ever had!

The Bible is not the kind of book Fundamentalists make it out to be, nor was it ever intended to be. It makes no such claims for itself. It would be far more Christian and much more defensible to argue for a perfect Savior rather than a perfect book. We can believe in a perfect and inerrant Lord and Savior without having to believe the same about the "earthen vessels" that reveal him to us. God did not give us a book to save us, but a Person. His "unspeakable gift" is Jesus Christ, not literary documents, however important those documents may be.

It should be enough to allow the Bible to speak for itself: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The next verse says the Scriptures are "perfect" in the sense that "the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." But the Scriptures nowhere claim for themselves perfection in the sense of being inerrant or even "complete," if that is made to mean a clearly defined canon of documents. Biblical writers appear to be indifferent to such issues as infallibility, inerrancy, or even a defined canon of Scripture. They are rather consumed by a story to tell and experiences to relate.

To insist that the church must have a complete and perfect Bible is to go against the facts of history. Even if we assume that the Bible as we now know it is complete, which we cannot as we shall presently show, the church did not have such a Bible until 367 AD. Some books, such as Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, and Revelation were not accepted as canonical until the fourth century. Others, such as the Didache (Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), I Clement, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas, were considered inspired and bordered on being canonical, but finally were not accepted.

For a time there were rival canons, part of the church accepting one list, another part a different list. Only the Christians in the eastern church had to bother with trying to interpret the enigmatic book of Revelation, for the rest of the church did not accept it. It was not until Bishop Athanasius wrote a letter in 367 listing all the books of the New Testament as we now have them that there was general acceptance of what made up the canon. It was formally accepted by the church at the Council of Rome in 382.

So, the makeup of the Bible was determined by the church—bishops and councils—not by divine fiat. The Holy Spirit never revealed a list of the documents that should make up the Bible. The Bible did not produce the church but the church produced the Bible, and that after many, many years and with no little controversy. That is why it is difficult to argue that the true church is to be restored according to “the pattern” in the New Testament, for the earliest churches had no such pattern.

Do we have a “complete” Bible? That this question has no simple answer threatens the very foundation of Fundamentalism, for it is amiss to contend for a perfect, inerrant Bible when we can’t be sure what makes up the Bible. Paul implies that there was a letter to the Corinthians that we do not have (1 Cor. 5:9), and he refers to a letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16) that we do not have. Should the spade of an archaeologist turn up these documents should they be added to our present Bible, along with Paul’s other letters? If so, is our present canon “complete”?

It really gets sticky in the Old Testament, for there are books all over the place that are referred to that we do not have. Notice some of them: the book of Nathan the prophet (1 Chron. 29:29), the book of Gad the seer (1 Chron. 29:29), the visions of Gad the seer (2 Chron. 9:29), the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14), the Book of Jashur (Joshua 10:13), the chronicles of King David (1 Chron. 27:24), the book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kgs.11:41), the book of Shemaiah (2 Chron. 12:15). All of these are referred to as being authoritative but none is in our Bible.

The Jewish church determined the Old Testament canon, but there was no final agreement until 90 A.D. at the Council of Jamnia. And even then some rabbinical scholars refused to accept Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, and for very good reasons

we Christians have to admit. Esther is vindictive, Ecclesiastes is pessimistic, and the Song of Solomon is a sensual love story. One can only be amazed that the latter ever became a part of anyone's Bible! Had it not been for the magic name of Solomon it would not have been.

While the Christian church accepted the Jewish canon for the Old Testament, there are two different canons. The Roman Catholics, along with the Greek Orthodox and other eastern churches, accept the Apocrypha, which adds some 18 books to the OT canon. But the Protestant Bible, the one used by most Fundamentalists, does not include these books. Which is the "complete" Bible? If one bothers to read such enlightening books as the Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus, he is left to wonder how such writings could be rejected—while accepting Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon!

If you are not yet sufficiently confused, the writers of the New Testament will confuse you further, for they quoted, not from the old Hebrew Bible (the inspired one!), but from the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (about 200 B.C.), which contained the Apocrypha. So, the early church (probably Jesus as well) used a more "complete" Bible than the one we have!

If I have confused you, it is OK to be confused, for it is confusing. And you don't have to be un-confused, for the Bible is not your God. It doesn't all have to be perfectly ordered. We don't have to have a "complete" Bible, for what is complete to one is incomplete to another. And it doesn't have to be exact and inerrant. What. it intends to do —convey the message—it does, and nothing else matters all that much.

There is no indication that God's eternal purpose was to give us a bunch of documents or a book, but to give us himself in the form of his own Son. No prophet or apostle set out to write a Bible. God raised up a nation in order to produce that Person who would be in his own image. He was a covenant-making God who created a covenant people. Those people, in both OT and NT, created documents along the way, lots of them, describing their experiences. This they did by the inspiration of God, though we can't know what all that meant. It at least means that God made it happen.

And so we have the holy Scriptures, not necessarily an exact canon, but it doesn't have to be and can't be. We can believe that God superintended events in such a way that we have all the Bible we need. We have all the truth we need and more than we will ever practice, but that doesn't mean there may not be truth that we do not have. The Bible as we have it tells the story God wants told, especially in reference to Jesus Christ. We may not have Paul's lost letters or the book of Jashur or the Apocrypha, but we don't have to have. In what we do have there are jars and clashes along the way, errors if you please, but there

is nothing that blunts the message that Jesus is Lord. In fact the jars and clashes accentuate the message all the more.

It is like the old phonograph records that depict the faithful dog with its ear close to the megaphone. There may be static in the recording but "the Master's voice" comes through clear and loud: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:31).—*the Editor*

> Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for power equal to your tasks.—*Phillip Brooks*
>
> God calls His followers to be courageous, fearless, and confident. He will neither abandon nor forsake us … Faith in the marvelous, provisionary Lord will bring the gentle hand of hope to these lands.—*Terry Rush*

Barton Stone's Address to the Churches of Christ. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (17)

It would be understandable if concerned Americans appealed to the virtues of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, or Abraham Lincoln as a possible answer to the predicament this nation faces in the 1990's. In times of crisis we look to our past for possible clues on what we might do to solve our problems. Those who have gone before and who struggled with similar problems often have wisdom to bequeath. But we are slow to learn the lesson of history. Lincoln, for instance, warned that a nation cannot endure half free and half slave. Yet we continue to be enslaved in part by racism, injustice, and poverty.

In the same way the Church of Christ might save itself from obscurantism, obsolescence, and irrelevance (as well as exclusivism, sectarianism, and isolationism) by an appeal to a nobler era of its history. Warnings that we are in trouble are being heard from unexpected places. In listening to some of the tapes of the recent lectureship at Pepperdine, I heard one speaker, who was frequently interrupted by applause by his large audience, cry

out in no uncertain terms, “The Church of Christ is dead!” He was calling for change, particularly in reference to the ministry of women, “bringing the women into the church,” as he put it.

Those who are calling for change these days are not always aware of the contributions that can be made by our forebears. They too went through the crucible of change, and out of their struggle comes wisdom that would serve us well. The lessons from our past are there for us to learn. Must we go on making the same mistakes over and over again.

As an illustration of what I mean I refer to but one document, a single letter in fact, by Barton W. Stone, entitled most appropriately for our purposes, “An Address To the Churches of Christ.” It was written in 1832 and grows out of the drama and trauma of the union between the Stone and Campbell churches that had taken place in Lexington, Ky. that same year. In this address Stone was seeking to effect the union further by addressing problems that troubled the Movement both then and now.

So, in this installment I am saying that the Church of Christ can be saved by taking heed to the principles set forth by Barton Stone in his address to Churches of Christ 160 years ago. That he was not wholly ignored back then is one reason why the Movement enjoyed substantial success and remained united for at least two generations. It would be well if this address were published in its entirety as a resource for change in our time. It is in order for us to consider the main ideas set forth.

In addressing “the Churches of Christ,” Stone is using but one of three names our people used in the early years of our history, the others being Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ, the latter being preferred by Alexander Campbell. But generally our people used all three names and they applied to but one people, one church. It is a travesty that the Movement eventually divided so thoroughly that we now have three branches (a euphemism for factions?), each known by one of these names, mainly.

It is incredible how well Stone read the future as well as the present in what he said to the Churches of Christ in 1832. Early on in the Address he warned against unwritten creeds, which he considered more dangerous than written ones. The purpose of both, he noted, “is to exclude from fellowship the man who dissents from them.” He observes that there are those who clamor against (written) creeds and yet have creeds (unwritten) of their own, and they are as intolerant toward those who dissent from their creeds as those who make written creeds are toward their dissenters.

Stone could have added that it is always the “liberal” or the innovator that motivates creed-making, for creeds are calculated to defend orthodoxy. Creeds are designed to draw lines and to defend the party line. Stone was right in preferring written creeds to unwritten

ones, for written ones are more reliable and predictable. In unwritten creeds people make up their rules as they go along, tailoring the creed to fit the occasion or the one "to be marked."

What pain we would have avoided had the wisdom of this pioneer reached our ears. With ne'er a (written) creed in sight we have been creed-makers, and, like Stone said, we have used them to draw lines on each other and to exclude one another from fellowship. We have made creeds of our opinions, whether in reference to theories like millennialism, questions such as marriage and divorce, or methods like instrumental music or Sunday schools. It is of course appropriate for each of us to follow his own conviction in reference to any of these, but it is not all right to make a creed out of them. Creed-making makes parties, whether they be written or unwritten creeds, and that is what lies behind all our divisions.

Barton W. Stone probably said more about the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of the Christian than any of our leading pioneers. In this Address he refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit as "more necessary" than faith, reformation, and immersion. The Holy Spirit more important than baptism? In an open letter to Churches of Christ? Most of us would not have supposed that we have that kind of emphasis in our early history. Stone names the gift of the Holy Spirit as "the crowning blessing of all blessings. He quotes Gal. 3:14 and Acts 5:32 to show that the Spirit is received through faith and that it is given to those that obey Christ.

In this connection Stone laid out the plan of salvation in a way that somehow got lost before today's Church of Christ came along: "God's plan appears to be this, that whoever believes, repents and is baptized, or obeys the gospel, shall be saved, shall receive remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Stone was always emphatic about the Holy Spirit. One of his favorite sermons was "Four Kinds of Unity," three of which he named as false unities. Head union, book union, water union are not true union, while fire unity, the radiating Spirit of God within us, is what makes us really one. In another context he named the difference between the Holy Spirit and the sectarian spirit. The Holy Spirit. he said, bears the fruit of humility, forbearance. love, peace, and unity. The sectarian spirit leads to pride, preeminence, intolerance, and opposition to those of another party. He went on to say that it is the sectarian spirit that causes discord, strife, and division. *(Christian Messenger,* 1832, p. 21).

In the light of such teaching it would hardly be appropriate to label the modern Churches of Christ as Stoneites. Somewhere along the line we forgot that the Holy Spirit had ever been given, or we supposed he went into retirement in some past age. And how many of us would say that the Holy Spirit is more important than baptism?

While in this Address Stone makes a strong case for immersion, he stops short of saying that only the immersed are Christians. He put it this way: “We have no doubt that multitudes have been changed, are pious, and will ultimately be saved with an everlasting salvation who have not been immersed.” He went on to concede that immersion is God’s plan, but that we cannot hold God to his plan and not allow him to pardon a humble penitent without immersion. He added, “Far from us be this sentiment.”

But this sentiment, a hard-line, legalistic position on immersion for remission of sins, has not been far from us in the Church of Christ. We can see that it did not begin with Stone.

Stone was hopeful that this Address would help to unite the Stone and Campbell movements despite their differences. He therefore emphasized what he considered a crucial principle of their plea for unity: *Christians may differ without dividing.* He referred to two differences between their churches at this time, which troubled people on both sides. The Campbell people placed greater emphasis upon immersion for remission of sins than the Stone churches, and the Campbell churches broke bread every first day while the Stone people didn’t.

This diversity of doctrine and practice led Stone to emphasize what had characterized the Movement from the outset: “We who profess to stand upon the Bible alone, and contend that opinions of truth should not be made terms of fellowship—shall we be intolerant towards each other because we may differ in our opinions? Forbid it, Heaven!”

Here Stone is telling us what we must do to be saved. We must cease and desist from making our own interpretation of what we believe to be the truth (an opinion, Stone calls it) a test of fellowship. And he says this includes such matters as the design of baptism and the frequency of the Lord’s supper. Hear him: “All believe that immersion is baptism:’ referring to the Stone and Campbell people, “why should they who submit to the one baptism contend and separate because they do not exactly view every design of it alike?”

Stone went on to say what should be proclaimed in every Church of Christ in the land today: “If you think your brother in error, labor in the spirit of love and meekness to convince him; but imposing zeal against him will only harden him against any good impression you would make. It will probably stir up strife. and ultimately destroy love, the bond of union.”

Note the words “imposing zeal against him,” such as in a big debate. It was not by accident that Barton Stone never had a debate, which is seldom “in the spirit of love and meekness” that he called for in his Address. Here we have the recipe for our salvation from

"Father Stone" as they called him in his old age . We have fought, debated, and divided ourselves to the point that love, the bond of union, has been destroyed.

We must repent of our ugly, sectarian past and resolve to follow Stone's advice when he went on to say in his Address to us, the Churches of Christ: "A little longer forbearance with each others' weakness, and truth will triumph."

In that Address the old reformer went out to give expression to his motto, which is today engraved in stone under his name on the cenotaph that stands in front of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville: "Let the unity of Christians be our polar star." The motto was inspired by Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. We are to be ONE so that the world might be WON, our Lord says in that prayer.

With our eyes cast on that polar star, the unity of all believers, and our hearts and minds resolved to do our part to answer the Lord's prayer so that the world may believe, we can get back on track and save ourselves as well as others.—*the Editor*

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WHAT IS DISTINCT ABOUT "THE LORD'S CHURCH"?

One of our Texas readers writes me about a tract that his daughter picked up at a Church of Christ she was visiting. The tract, entitled "The Current 'Unity Movement,'" referred to me as one "whose sole purpose seems to be to undermine and destroy the distinctiveness of the Lord's church." It also charged me with "poisoning the minds of a younger generation."

The latter charge reminds me of Socrates. He was corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens, they charged. The old philosopher was forced to drink hemlock. His last words deserve to live on: "Men of Athens, we depart. You to live and I to die. Only God knows which is better." To die nonchalantly is the way to disappoint one's persecutors. Socrates discussed ideas up to the time that they served the hemlock, which he drank without blinking! It is unlikely that I will be executed for "poisoning" the minds of our youth. It is just as well, for I would never be able to think of such an appropriate thing to say as did Socrates.

It is the first criticism that stirred my thinking, leading me to ask, *What is distinctive about the Lord's church?* And distinct from what?, I asked myself. From the world? Pagan society? Perhaps the writer meant "distinct from denominations."

It is the kind of question I like. It is in fact a philosophical question, "ontological" they call it, for it has to do with essence. What makes humankind distinct from animals? What makes spirit distinct from matter? The question asks, what is the nature of the church? Or to put it in Aristotelian terms, what would the church have to lose in order to no longer be the church? Aristotle concluded that a man loses his essence or his "whatness" when he ceases being rational. What is the "whatness" of the church? If I am bent upon destroying the essence or distinctiveness of the church, I would like to know what it is that I am destroying or trying to.

One of the ancient creeds of the church spoke to this: "We believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." I suspect we would all agree that the church is at least these four things. As our own Thomas Campbell put it, "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." A divided church can't be the Lord's church. But Paul assures us that Christ can't be divided, and so his church cannot be divided (1 Cor. 1:13). Unity is part of the "whatness" of the church.

The church is holy because it is filled with the Holy Spirit. Its members are saints or holy ones—not perfect but saints nonetheless. The church cannot be unholy and still be the church. Holiness is part of its essence (Eph. 5:27).

It is catholic in that it is not racist, sexist, provincial, or parochial. It is neither east nor west, north nor south. It is universal in that it encompasses all humankind—all races, colors, nations, tribes, and tongues (Rev. 7:9). Catholicity is part of its whatness. A church calculated to be white, southern, middle-class, or male-dominated cannot be the true Church of Christ.

It is apostolic in that it is rooted in the teaching of Christ and his apostles. The earliest church "continued in the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). It is built upon the foundation of the apostles, with Christ its chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

These are what make the Lord's church distinctive: oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. There are of course many other things that can be said about the nature of the church, but they can all be summarized in this fourfold whatness. The church is to be pentecostal or Spirit-filled or Christlike, but that is what holiness means. It is to be evangelistic, but that is implied in apostolic. It is to be educational; that too is in apostolic. It is to be God's family, bound together in fervent love one for another, but that is included in oneness, for only love can unite us.

All this can be said in different ways. When Karl Barth was asked what makes a true church, he answered, "Wherever the power of Christ is at work in the lives of the people." I'll buy that, for that too is the church's whatness.

Back to the tract. It just might be that its author had in mind “none of the above” when he wrote of the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church. Our people are known to refer to “the Lord’s church” in reference to the Yellow-Pages “Church of Christ.” They are not referring to what Alexander Campbell referred to as “the Christians in all the sects” or to what Thomas Campbell meant by “the Church of Christ upon earth.” The reason is simple: all Christians are in “the Church of Christ.”

From this perspective the list of what is “distinctive” is very different indeed. Such as the distinctive name “Church of Christ.” No other name is allowed on the sign out front or on the letterhead. You don’t say you’re a member of the Church of God or the Christian Church. And such methods as acappella singing. If there is any instrumentation anywhere it cannot be “the Lord’s church.” And such as male-dominated services. If a woman takes part in leading the service, even if only reading the Scriptures or leading a prayer or hymn, it cannot be the true church.

So, where are we? What “Lord’s church” is the tract talking about? The Church of Christ of holy Scripture and of the Campbells, or the Yellow-Pages “Church of Christ.” If I am seeking to destroy the distinctiveness of the latter, it is a charge that I might allow, for that is the way to bring an end to sectarianism and denominationalism: *Eliminate everything that is distinctive as terms of unity and fellowship.* Acappella music, for example, is of course all right when it is preferred, but it must not be made a test of fellowship, nor can it be made catholic.

I do not seek to “destroy” acappella music in the “Church of Christ.” I only say that we are not to reject as equals those Christians who happen to disagree with us, and we are not to make it a test of fellowship.

As for “the Lord’s church” in the broader context, I have, if I know my heart, worked and prayed most of my life for the enhancement of its oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. My first and greatest mission has been to have those virtues in my own life. I have succeeded only in part. The reformation of the church must begin in one’s own life and one’s own heart. Then we can reach out to others with long suffering and teaching, as the Scriptures enjoin, to make the church upon earth all that God wants it to be.

If when it is allover the Lord says, “Well tried, good and faithful servant,” that will be my glory. And it is just as well, isn’t it, that the Lord, who is eager to show mercy, remain on the throne as the judge over us all? Who knows, he might even show mercy to those who have to drink hemlock!—*the Editor*

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HOW ABOUT WOMEN ELDERS?

Cecil Hook

Although I could always see inconsistency in the restrictions that we placed upon women in service capacities, I was content to limit women to their traditional roles as a "safe course." Along with the usual restrictive proof-texts, I often quoted the sharp-witted English writer Samuel Johnson: "Sir, a woman preaching is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

Compelled by honesty with myself, however, in time my studies have forced me to change many strongly conditioned conclusions. Now I must admit that I see only one main restriction hindering a women from any Christian ministry that her male counterpart can fulfil.

A few years ago I came across a booklet with a long title, "The Christian Woman May Pray in the Public Worship Assembly," written by Darrell Foltz. After reading it, I wrote the author stating that he had answered every objection that I had except one. If women are accepted in the same capacities as men, I inquired, why did Jesus not choose some women apostles?

Pondering that question after mailing the letter, I concluded that it was because the culture of his society would have considered it objectionable. A few days later I received a similar explanation from the author of the booklet.

That is the chief, if not the only, restriction to be considered relating to the women's activity today.

This factor is not too surprising when we consider that social and cultural perceptions are considered relating to various other things like the veil, women's hair, the kiss, footwashing, and slavery.

The limiting statements in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 were meant to correct improprieties in the conduct of certain women in their particular situations. Paul was not laying down universal prohibitions. He had already told what women could do in I Corinthians 11, and he had not changed his mind by the time he wrote chapter 14. He said that they could pray and prophesy in their gatherings.

Paul's regulations relate to husband-wife more than to man-woman relations. Man is not the head of woman in a universal sense. I am not the head of your wife; neither do you have authority over my wife. The husband is the head of his wife and she is to be submissive to him, not me. These points are clarified in good studies, or re-studies, that are now available in books and tapes.

Simply put: Paul plainly states that women may pray and prophesy, and Philip had four daughter who did so. And few of us would deny that a woman may rightly do what the evangelist Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch. He preached Jesus to him, and she can preach in a similar manner. So what is the problem other than our prejudicial social conditioning?

Alright, you caught me in a trap, didn't you? A woman cannot he an elder. An elder must be the husband of one wife. We have never seen a woman with a wife!

It is undeniable that Phoebe was a deacon (the Greek has no feminine form like the English deaconness). Women are included in the description of deacons in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. They were to qualify as deacons. Yet it says, "Let deacons be the husband of one wife." If a woman can be a deacon without a wife. why can she not be an elder without one?

The descriptions of elders and deacons are not lists of legal qualification as we have generally perceived them to be, else the lists to Timothy and Titus would be identical. They are, however, the general description of the kind of persons to recognize. Paul used terms like man and he, like we do at times, to indicate persons without reference to gender, and he specifically includes women in 1 Timothy 3.

Are you declaring that you will never reach these conclusions. I never thought that I would either. But when I declared that I would not change my mind, I was really saying to myself that I already knew and understood everything about the subject and would grow no more.

Fortunately, as with the expansion of my waistline, growth is not always intentional, invited, and without resistance. Expansion is of God when we hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Will the women's service be forever restricted as long as anyone objects to their participation? If it is the weak brother whose conscience is being violated, respect must be given to his convictions until he can be taught more fully. But the stubborn person who refused to grow in understanding is not the weak brother. He is the divisive brother when he demands that his ideas rule.

In Romans 14 and elsewhere Paul called for consideration of persons with scruples about meat, days, and circumcision, yet he did not permit them to bind diet, days, or circumcision. We must not continue to allow contentious people to limit Christian liberty by binding their convictions. Much courageous teaching of the weak brother needs to be done regarding the liberty of women.

It is not the “safe course” to forbid the exercise of the God-given gifts of women in serving. *—1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

> Ultimately all preaching must be the attempt to reconcile men to God through Jesus Christ; and therefore the preacher must continuously confront the hearer with the challenge of the Gospel of Christ and the invitation to the pilgrimage of the Christian life.-- William Barclay

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Early in the summer I had three funerals, all related to old friendships. One was for a 40-year old woman in Tyler who drowned under questionable circumstances. The authorities continue to investigate. Ouida and I knew her parents before she was born. The entire family are dear friends. It was very sad. A funeral in Dallas for another old friend who died at 97 was more of a home going celebration. A devoted Christian, she had lived many years in nursing homes where we often visited her. All through the years it was important to her that I do her funeral, which I did, assuring the few that gathered that death was the last of the beatitudes that she enjoyed in this world. Another funeral was here in Denton for a 61-year old cancer victim whom I prayed with in the hospital shortly before he died. He had the longest obituary that I have ever read at a funeral, and his many relatives created a funeral procession that stretched across much of Denton, few of whom I knew. His mother, another longtime friend, asked me to do his service. At graveside we did what the mourners had never seen before. I asked the relatives to say what they would about their beloved deceased. For several minutes brothers, sisters, nephews, cousins, children, grandchildren said a word of remembrance. When a little girl seated near where I was standing looked up to me and said quietly, “He was a good granddaddy.” I had her repeat it so that all could hear. She spoke up again, clearly enough for heaven and earth to hear, *He was a good granddaddy!* Now don’t you know that thrilled the heart of one dear soul who had gone up higher! It was one of those tender moments in life that we have to leave to poets to describe.

Ouida and I visited several churches in the area in early summer. I spoke for four Sundays on our heritage in Scripture and in history at the Burbank Garden Church of Christ in Grand Prairie, a suburb of Dallas, an old church that is affected by population shifts. Some found their history, which they knew little about, liberating in that they discovered they belonged to a Movement that was not sectarian at the outset. I was at the Pecan Grove Church of Christ in Greenville one Lord's day, a church I have frequently visited through the years and always with great delight. On that particular Sunday we had a joint service with a nearby Christian Church. I also spoke for two Sundays at the Melissa Christian Church (Disciples), which was once part of a thriving farming community not far north of Dallas. It has women elders, sisters who have long been devoted to Christ and his church, and who have kept that church going when it wasn't easy. I also "filled in" several times for teachers at our church here in Denton, teaching a variety of ages, including "single again," high school kids, and international students, one of whom afterwards, once he accepted Christ, requested that I baptize him, probably because he saw me as an aged guru, which fits his Chinese upbringing.

Speaking of international students, hundreds of whom we have in our two universities here, we Christians need to become more global conscious. This might mean to see the world in terms of "a geography of need," to be informed about the weightier problems of the world. The burgeoning population is an example. Every four days we have enough additional people in the world to populate another Dallas or Detroit. Every ten years we have enough additional millions to populate all of Africa and South America combined! Where will all these people live, what will they eat, how will they be housed and educated? Lest we forget, it is God's creation that we are talking about, the world he loves.

Pope John Paul II repeatedly calls for the conversion of the western nations, which includes America, from consumerism. He says we are addicted to material goods, especially superfluous goods. Do we have an undue attachment to the passing goods of this earth? Is running up debts through impulse buying pleasing to God?, the pope asks.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

I have just finished reading *The Stone-Campbell Movement* and I had to tell you how great I think it is. The historical perspective it gives is right on the money, not only on how the movement began but where we are now and how we got that way. Your book should be

read by all descendents of the movement, especially by the leaders.—Russ Hicks, Sodus, MI.

(I appreciate this commendation. This book has been out of print for a year now. I am presently preparing a revised edition, with some parts being completely rewritten and brought up to date. We hope to have the revised edition ready within a few months.—*Ed*.)

I remember Carl Ketcherside's quote, "We have no right to make anything a condition of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation." Another was "Unity does not consist of seeing everything alike on the understanding level, but of welcoming one another on the faith level." I hope I can always accept my brothers in Christ on that level of love and faith.—*Jerry Black, Olney, IL.*

Many of us could write volumes on what the Church of Christ must do to be saved. First, we must accept the fact that we have much to learn and do not have all the truth. Second, we must accept the worth and dignity of all people as Paul expressed in Gal. 3:28. I hope before you close your paper you will be able to conclude that God has made no distinction in privileges and duties between man and woman. A God who discriminates the way we do would not be worthy of worship.—*Don Owens, Laguna Niguel, CA.*

(I suppose we are close to saying that in this issue. See Cecil Hook's essay on *How About Women Elders?,* which we believe the reader will find very persuasive.—*Ed*.)

Our churches are hungering for more openness, love, and acceptance of others, including men and women accepting each other as equals in the assembly. Your years of editing have contributed more than any of us can measure. A holy kiss to you both.—*Janelle Thomas, Aurora, CO.*

It is hard to think about there being no more issues with your challenging, inspiring, thought-provoking comments and in-sights. You have contributed to my growth in spirituality and to a broader concept of the Kingdom. The best to you and Ouida for several years of more relaxing activities.—*Eva Honn, Mattoon, IL.*

I hate to think that your publication will cease at the end of this year. I have enjoyed it so much for a number of years, and feel that I know you both personally. When it arrives through the mail, I consider it a dear friend visiting in my home. May God's richest blessing be with you.—*Maggie Lou Kirkpatrick, Lebanon, TN.*

(This gracious letter from a dear sister expresses what many of our readers have said through the years, and Ouida and I want to take this occasion to thank you for letting us be friends together, "whom having never seen, we love." As Peter said that about Jesus, we say that about you. We have always thought of this paper as "personal journalism," not

unlike a friend writing to another.—*Ed*.)

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BOOK NOTES

Now that this paper will soon be history our back loose copies are more in demand. We are letting them go at 40 cents each or 15 for $5.00 postpaid. Unless you specify otherwise these will be selected at random from many years back. We still have six bound volumes, one single volumes and five double volumes, 11 years total, from 1978 through 1990 (except 1979-80), $65.00 postpaid, which is less than the sub rate.

We are pleased that *Our Heritage in Unity and Fellowship,* edited by Cecil Hook, is doing so well. It is made up of select articles from Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, along with an interesting introduction by Cecil Hook. It is a beautifully designed paperback of 350 pages, and a big bargain at $9.95 postpaid, inexpensive enough to order an extra one for a friend.

One of my favorite writers on the history of the Church of Christ/Christian Churches is Louis Cochran. He has the right feel of what the Movement was about. We are indebted to College Press for keeping his books in print, and we are pleased to offer them as follows: *The Fool of God,* a historical novel about Alexander Campbell, and super! ($12.50 pp.); *Raccoon John Smith,* a historical novel on the Kentucky frontier preacher ($12.50 pp.); *Captives of the Word,* a 274-page narrative history of the Movement, ($13.50 pp.). If you are building a library on our heritage this is the place to start.

Another important resource for the study of our heritage is Walt Yancey's *Endangered Heritage: An Examination of Church of Christ Doctrine,* which has the virtue of allowing the pioneers to speak for themselves, and you'll be surprised at some things they wrote. This book is hard-hitting but kind and reasonable. Just the kind of self-examination we need. $10.95 postpaid.

No book on the subject of the woman's ministry in the church has struck home like Faith Martin's *Call Me Blessed*. She is forthright in dealing with the relevant passages. You will appreciate both her charm and her insights. $9.95 postpaid.

A readable church history is always welcome. For the first time we mention and recommend James B. North's *A History of the Church From Pentecost to Present.* It starts with the apostolic church and goes through the Reformation and up to modern churches. It is a *general* history, referring to the Restoration Movement only briefly. $13.50 postpaid.

Subscription Rates: $6.00 one year (you will receive all the issues still available for 1992) or renewal $1.80 for the duration (Dec. 1992). In clubs of three or more (mailed by us) $1.50 per name for the duration or $3.50 per name for all available issues 1992. Foreign $3.00 for the duration.

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